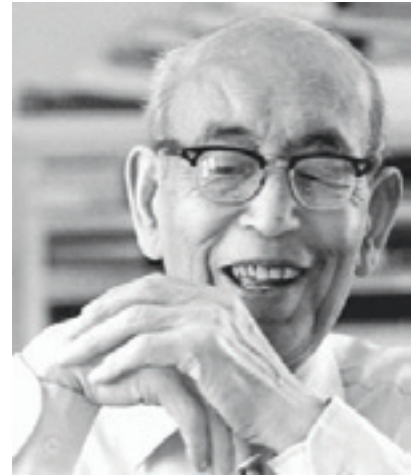


Dr Masajiro Miyazaki— enemy alien?

“We interrupt this program to bring you a special news bulletin. The Japanese have attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, by air . . .”

—Radio announcer



Dr Masajiro Miyazaki

Sterling Haynes, MD

The music at the outdoor skating rink in Edmonton, Alberta, resumed playing “I’ve Got a Lovely Bunch of Coconuts” as many skaters headed inside. It was Sunday afternoon, 7 December 1941, and we all changed our skates and headed home to hear about the tragedy in detail.

With this news the smoldering resentment against the Japanese was brought to a boiling point in Canada. Racism turned to violence in Vancouver and increased when 2000 Canadian soldiers who were defending Hong Kong were killed or captured when the Japanese took the island on 25 December 1941. After these events, violence and racism ran rampant in British Columbia. Even though there were army and RCMP officials who spoke out in support of Canadian Japanese men, women, and children—insisting that they were no threat to Canada—the CPR fired all Japanese workers and the Royal Canadian

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This article has been peer reviewed.

Navy confiscated all Japanese fishing vessels. All Japanese schools and newspapers were closed. Ian Mackenzie, a federal cabinet minister under Prime Minister Mackenzie King, shouted his slogan, “No Japs from the Rockies to the seas,” and the federal government declared a protected area (160 km wide) along the Pacific Coast. Racial persecution included deportation of all Japanese people, naturalized or not, to prisoner-of-war camps in the BC Interior, and a dusk-to-dawn curfew was imposed on these Japanese enemy aliens.

Initially the enemy aliens were to pack one suitcase and be transported to a detention centre in Hastings Park—the Pacific National Exhibition in Vancouver. For a few months thousands were confined to horse and cattle stalls in the Hastings Park barns. In the spring they were relocated by train to shantytowns in Kaslo, New Denver, Blue River, Greenwood, Lillooet, Bridge River, and elsewhere.

One practising medical man from Vancouver, Dr Masajiro Miyazaki, and his family were imprisoned and sent to the Taylor Field prisoner-of-war camp in Bridge River. Here is the story of this dedicated Canadian and compassionate doctor.

The early years

Dr Masajiro Miyazaki was born in Japan in 1899 and immigrated to Canada from Yokohama. Masajiro left his mother and sailed on the *Empress of India* to arrive in Vancouver on 24 June 1913. His Canadian Japanese father met him at the dock and arranged for his room and board to be paid for 6 months in Vancouver. He was taught English through the Catholic Church for a few months and later enrolled in Lord Strathcona Elementary School, from which he graduated at the top of his class. He then attended Duke of Connaught High School in New Westminster. In his teens he worked as a gardener and dishwasher in Vancouver’s Little Tokyo.

Masajiro went on to study at the University of British Columbia and was active in student politics. In 1922 he participated in the Great Trek, where students marched through downtown Vancouver to the then-unfinished campus at Point Grey and subsequently managed to sway politicians to resume work on the new campus with great public support. In 1925 Masajiro received his bachelor’s degree in arts and science from UBC and then applied to medical school at Queens University but was not accept-

ed. At that time universities refused admission to many Asian people. All Japanese individuals were also refused internships, without which you could not receive a licence to practise medicine. Around the same time Masajiro applied for naturalization papers, though he did not become a Canadian citizen until after the Second World War when his papers finally resurfaced after having been declared lost.

The start of a storied career

Masajiro was determined to become a doctor, so he looked to schools south of the border. American medical schools required a \$1000 bond to be posted by all Japanese students, and the Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine in Missouri agreed to pay his bond. Dr Miyazaki graduated with a DO (doctor of osteopathy), having supported himself through school by working as a waiter in a fraternity house.

On 15 May 1930 Dr Miyazaki was licensed by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC. He opened an office in Vancouver and practised there until 7 December 1941, the day of the attack on Pearl Harbor.

In addition to being an active general practitioner in the 1930s, Dr Miyazaki made time for many other things. In 1934 he married Sumiko Shimizu, a graduate of the University of Washington, in an arranged marriage. From 1934 to 1941 he served as a councillor for the Canadian Japanese Association and was active in UBC's Japanese Alumni Association. In 1937 he even started a weekly Japanese newspaper with Tommy Shoyama, who later became a financial guru, an economist, and a deputy minister of finance with the federal government of the time.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, all resident aliens in Canada were reclassified as enemy aliens and Masajiro and his wife were shipped to a prisoner-of-war camp in the Bridge

River/Lillooet area. There they learned to endure racism and persecution during the war years and after.

The war years and beyond

It is believed that from the spring of 1942 to 1944 Dr Miyazaki looked after the Japanese prisoners of war in the camp. When the local Lillooet physician, Dr Patterson, died suddenly in 1944, the area lost its corner and only doctor. The RCMP, town council, and the securities commis-

Dr Miyazaki modified a railroad speeder, or track-maintenance car, into an enclosed ambulance that could carry a stretcher and equipment, and provide seats for a driver and the doctor.

sion realized they needed to find a replacement quickly. With no other candidates presenting themselves, they approached Dr Miyazaki and asked the good doctor to move into town from the camp. He and his wife were soon reclassified from enemy aliens to resident aliens.

When Dr Miyazaki moved into Lillooet he was allowed to purchase a new Plymouth and given wartime gasoline ration tickets. In exchange he looked after the citizens of Lillooet, Bridge River, Bralorne, all the people living along the Pacific Great Eastern (PGE) Railway, and all the whistle stops in between, along with attending to all the police and corner's work. That was humble pie for

the police, security commission, and local politicians.

Soon after the move Dr Miyazaki realized that he would need chains for his car's tires in order to be able to travel on the snowy mountain passes. As an ingenious solution he developed studded tires from welded steel bars and horseshoe nails, which allowed him to make house calls and take the sick to the small Fountain Red Cross hospital or transport them to the hospital in Lytton. He later modified a railroad speeder, or track-maintenance car, into an enclosed ambulance that could carry a stretcher and equipment, and provide seats for a driver and the doctor. Dr Miyazaki and other doctors used this Pacific Great Eastern Railway speeder ambulance for many years when the country roads were blocked by avalanches, mud slides, or floods.

In 1946 Dr Miyazaki decided that the town needed a road ambulance, and he persuaded the town council to purchase one after he offered to provide the \$200 down payment. The mayor asked the doctor if the town might use his personal garage to store the ambulance and if he would be the designated ambulance driver on some nights and weekends. Dr Miyazaki did it all happily, and was appointed chair of the town's ambulance service until 1967.

On one occasion Dr Miyazaki drove to the Niskip Indian Reserve in the middle of winter to see a young woman who was hemorrhaging from her vagina. With his studded tires he managed to climb the terrifying Texas Creek hill to attend to the woman. He kept a sterile kit of dilators and currettes in his black bag and was able to stop the bleeding, saving her life by performing a D&C (dilation and curettage) in her bedroom.

On another occasion he was called to see a boy who had been run over by a car while sledding. The vehicle's undercarriage had torn the child's

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the good doctor

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scalp off. Dr Miyazaki drove the boy many miles to the Pavilion General Store, and with the use of local anesthetic, his special Coleman lamp, and his surgical instruments he managed to reattach the boy's scalp using the store's countertop as an operating table.

There are many more examples of Dr Miyazaki's dedication to his work. When called to a passenger train 160 km from Lillooet where a young woman was bleeding profusely in a railroad passenger car, he met the train on his ambulance speeder, climbed aboard the train, and performed a D&C for an incomplete abortion. To allow the woman to recover, he and the patient took the train back to Lillooet and the good doctor admitted her to a bedroom in his house. His daughter, Mary, gave up her bedroom to the ailing woman for the night. By the next day the patient had recovered and Dr Miyazaki drove her back to the PGE station in the ambulance so she could continue her journey.

In 1945, when penicillin became available, Dr Miyazaki drove 100 km over Pavilion Mountain to the community of Jesmond in the Cariboo to see a blind, ill, elderly woman with pneumonia. The doctor gave the woman an intramuscular long-acting penicillin injection and what penicillin tablets he had in his bag. The patient recovered at home within a few days.

Dr Miyazaki was active in the community despite facing racial discrimination from a few of the residents and some of the doctors. At one point his name was even removed from the list of attending staff at the Lillooet Hospital. It was reinstated in 1954.

Dr Miyazaki remained busy performing home deliveries on the many Indian reserves, pulling abscessed teeth, and running the VD clinic. He also had a variety of jobs in the community besides running the ambulance service. He offered a daily me-



Dr Miyazaki's house in Lillooet. Today the historic house belongs to the District of Lillooet and is open to the public to showcase Dr Miyazaki's library and medical equipment.

teological service, his embalming service was very busy during the heat of summer, and he was the coroner and police surgeon for the RCMP. He was a talented photographer and often took pictures to illustrate a bad accident or murder scene. He even looked after many of the community's small pets.

The doctor helped organize the first stampede in the area in 1945 and was a judge in the first Indian baby photo contest. In 1950 he became the first elected Japanese Canadian alderman in Canada, serving for 5 years. He was a leader in the BPO Elks of Canada and was elected charter life member in 1970 for his dedication and his work as chaplain. He was active with his son in the Boy Scouts of Canada and organized many Scout jamborees.

In 1970 Dr Miyazaki was elected Freeman of the village but was sent to Kamloops soon after in renal failure and remained there on renal dialysis. He was dialyzed 188 times, and after 2 years he returned to his beloved Lillooet. In 1973 he was elected president of the District Historical Society. That same year he wrote his biography, *My Sixty Years in Canada*—a fascinating read.

Dr Miyazaki and I had a few telephone conversations about mutual patients when he was practising in Lillooet and I was practising in Williams Lake in the 1960s. Dr Miyazaki was a dedicated doctor who seldom took a day off, knew all of his patients, and was compassionate and concerned about all of them.

In 1977 Dr Miyazaki received the Order of Canada for his work in Lillooet. He shared accolades with Margaret (Ma) Murray, editor of the *Bridge River-Lillooet News*, when they received their medals in Ottawa.

The good doctor died in 1984 and willed his house to the District of Lillooet. Today this historic house is run by local volunteers and is open to the public to showcase Dr Miyazaki's library and medical equipment.

The doctor was innovative, compassionate, and dedicated—he was a good guy. I know that Ma Murray would echo my words with “and that’s for damn sure.” **BCMJ**

A note on sources

Information in this essay came from Dr Miyazaki's self-published book, *My Sixty Years in Canada*, and phone conversations between Dr Haynes and Dr Miyazaki.